Apollo and Khshathrapati, the Median Nergal, at Xanthos

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Prods Oktor Skjærvø is distinguished not only by his broad range of expert erudition in Iranistics and his service to this field through both prolific publications and pedagogical aids, but also by his collegiality, including private and public openness to opposing views. I am confident that he will welcome my contribution to this celebration even though I will differ with him, as also with other notable Iranists, in the solution of the problem to which this paper is addressed.

An Old Iranian divine epithet Khshathrapati (*Xšaθrapati-*) "Lord of Power/Rule/Dominion" is attested as **ḫštrpty** in the Aramaic version of the trilingual stela erected at the Letoön of Xanthos, Lycia, by Pixodaros, the last Achaemenid satrap of Caria and Lycia (A. Dupont-Sommer in Metzger et al. 1974 and 1979). The Greek and Lycian versions of the inscription indicate that it is Apollo for which Khshathrapati is intended as equivalent. Since the publication of the inscription four decades ago, the consensus opinion that Khshathrapati is Mithra has had a growing dossier of alleged evidence. The present article is intended to show that the dossier is unconvincing, and to replace Mithra by another candidate for Khshathrapati.

The identification of Khshathrapati with Mithra was primarily motivated by Apollo's solarity, whereby the suggestion arose that the equivalent Iranian deity with a solar nature was Mithra. However, the sun was divinized in the Iranian cult as Huwar Khshaita (Avestan *huuarəxšaēta-*). Mithra was properly a god of social agreements (including contracts and pacts), whose course of inspection followed the sun across the sky, and in the course of the centuries before the Common Era became a sun-god himself. That this development had occurred for the Mithra worshipped in southwestern Anatolia in the late Achaemenid period cannot be taken for granted (see Gershevitch 1975).

Two other seeming corroborations of the Khshathrapati = Mithra theory were noted with the publication of the stela. The identification of Khshathrapati with Mithra appeared to have an auspicious precedent in R. Dussaud's view (see Dupont-Sommer 1976) that the ancient Levantine god named **šdrp'**, later called Σατράπης at Elis in the Peloponnese, is of Iranian origin, and represents Mithra as "Satrap." This opinion, as, we shall see, was more recently taken up by A. D. H. Bivar as part of the evidence for Khshathrapati = Mithra. In fact, the attestation of **šdrp'** is limited to the greater Phoenician area. His name is now known to consist of the Semitic **rp'** "healing, the healer" added to Egyptian **šd** "the savior" or "the enchanter," a form of Horus who repels vermin, who was brought by Semitic workmen to the Levant from Egypt, a provenience confirmed by the Egyptian traits of the earliest statues of the god from Lebanon dating perhaps as early as the 9th to 7th cent. B.C.E. The Hellenized form Σατράπης, attested in the Phoenician territory (whence the form in Elis), is but a popular etymology for **šdrp'**. See Schwartz 2006, 146, and 147, notes 8–15, with references to E. Lipiński. This Phoenician divinity is thus irrelevant for both Mithra and Khshathrapati (< *xšaθra-pati-*, in which the element **-pati-* "lord" differs from the *-pă-* "protector" of **xšaθrapă-* "satrap").

A more important apparent corroboration for Khshathrapati = Mithra was M. Mayrhofer's observation (*apud* Dupont-Sommer 1976, 653) of a formula, in several Brāhmaṇas, which declares that

Mitra is *kṣatrápati-* "Lord of Power." This implies that **xšaθrapati-* and *kṣatrápati-* represent parallel inheritances from a Proto-Indo-Iranian epithet **kšatrapati-* for *Mitra. However, no comparable Avestan epithet is found for Mithra. One only finds a structurally different genitive phrase instead of the compound, and this is for Mazda Ahura and not Mithra, in the Gathic Yasna 44.9 *paitišə . . . xšaθrahiiā* "Lord of Dominion/Power." The compound *kṣatrápati-* is not found in the Rigveda, which however commonly associates Varuṇa, and thence Mitrāvaruṇā, with *kṣatrá*, and this may lie behind the Brāhmaṇas' qualifying Mitra as *kṣatrápati-*. Possibly the Gathic *paitišə . . . xšaθrahiiā* is inherited from a pre-Zarathustrian Ahura who resembled Varuṇa; such an Ahura is evidenced in the Old Avestan Yasna Haptaŋhāiti, in which Mazdā Ahura's aqueous wives, the Ahurānīs, parallel Varuṇa's Varuṇānīs, and in the Gathas themselves, "not to be deceived is the all-binding (*vīspā.hišas*) Ahura," as Yasna 45.4e is correctly translated.

The lack of Iranian evidence for Mithra being *xšaθrapati-* was impressively addressed by P. O. Skjærvø (in Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, 99–100), who derived the name of the Manichean divinity **(ʾ)xš(ʾ)yšpt** etc. from **xšaθrapati-*, comparing as mythological equivalent Man. Middle Persian *dahybed* "Lord of the Land/Country" (also attested as a Sasanian title of a ruler), one of the "Sons of Mihr-yazd (= 'the god Mithra')."

Sims-Williams (*apud* Boyce 1990, 7 n. 7) showed that the Sogdian must represent *(ə)Xšēš-pat*, and attempted to explain the first element as **xšaiθra-* via contamination of *xšaθra-* "land, dominion" by **šaiθra-* (Avestan *šōiθra-*) "dwelling" or via the root-form *xšai-* "to rule." Sims-Williams' evidence for **xšaiθra-* is unsustainable. R. Schmitt's explanation of the Elamite divine name *Šetrabattiš* (rejecting as impossible etymology from **xšaθrapati-*) from a straightforward *šaiθrapati-* "Lord of the Dwelling/Settlement" (*pace* Sims-Williams, where Schmitt is cited) is corroborated by a Young Avestan divine appellation *šōiθrahe paiti-* (Yasna 2.16), whereas **xšaθrapati-* still requires support. Sims-Williams' other arguments for **xšaiθra-* are unconvincing. The form of Greek ἐξαιτράπης etc. (vs. σατράπης < **xšaθrapă–* "satrap") could be influenced by ἐξαιτεῖν "to command," cf. Late Latin *admiralis* < Arabic *ʾamīr* (? *al-*) via *admirabilis* or the like. Man. Parth. **ʾrdxšyhr**, Persian **ʾrdšyr**, derive from **Artaxša-θr(i)ya-*, indicated as **ʾrtḫštry** on Frataraka coinage, cf. Book Pahlavi **pʾtḫšyl** etc. vis-à-vis Inscriptional Pahl. **pʾtḫštry** "treaty" < **pātixšaθriya-*. Tumshuq Saka *xšera-*, Khotanese *kṣīra-* "country, land, kingdom" could formally derive from **šaiθra-* with semantic influence of *xšaθra-*.

However, the thesis of an etymological parallelism between Sogd. *(ə)Xšēš-pat* and MPers. *dahybed* fails for reasons of Manichean Middle Iranian realia. It is only in the Middle Persian that Mani's original Aramaic conception of Living Spirit and his five emanations was "translated" (in Mani's presentation of his ideas to the Zoroastrian king Shapur I) as the god Mithra and his five sons, the first four of whom are named from the Zoroastrian Pahlavi series *mānbed*, *wisbed*, *zandbed*, and *dahybed*, which render a series of four "lords" (Av. *-paiti-*) over a fourfold hierarchy (house, clan, tribe, land/country) associated with Mithra in his Avestan hymn, to which series *pāhr(ag)bed* "border lord" was added. It must be noted that neither the Living Spirit nor the *Splenditenens* is ever connected with Mithra in Man. Sogd. texts; Mithra, Man. Sogd. *myšyy βγyy*, is merely the Sun.

In Sogdian Manicheism, the equivalents of Mani's mytholegoumena are rendered quite differently from the Middle Persian, and in general translate or approximate Mani's original conceptions. Thus the Living Spirit is not named from Mithra (unlike the MPers., where *Mihryazd* = the Living Spirit)[1] but is directly translated *Žuwandē Γrīw* "Living Spirit" (~ *Wād Žīwandē/Žīwandag* < Parthian "*id.*") or is approximated as *Wēšparkar*, the local name of the Old Iranian atmospheric god (Av. *Vaiiuš Uparō.kairiiō*). Similarly the Sogdian names of the emanations of the Living Spirit. Mani's Adamas of the Light, who has a martial role, becomes Sogd. *Wšaγn*, the old god of victory in warfare. Mani's King of Honor becomes *Smān Xšēδ/Xšēθ* "Heaven King," while the Glorious King, who stands on the lowest earth, is named *Zāy Spandārmet* "the Earth (goddess) Spandārmet."

In this light, the Atlas' problematic Sogdian name, **pδfʾrβγyy**, which appears to mean "the god who causes rushing," could be explained by a conception of Atlas (in Man. Gr. ʾΩμοφόρος "Bearing [the earth] on the shoulders," Syr. *Sabbālā* "the bearer") as making the earth(s) whirl on his shoulders. Such a view may have arisen from the flat round shape of the earth borne aloft

being associated with the firmament, Sogd. *θfartē* (Psalm 19.1 **δβrty** = Syr. *rqīʿā*), the cognate of Av. *θβāṣa-* (< **θwárta-*) "rushing" and "firmament" (Schwartz 1974, 260) the latter word glossed in Persian as *xūb-čarx* "well-wheeled," cf. Pers. *čarx-i falak* "the (whirling) wheel of the firmament," sometimes expressed by *čarx* alone. The association of the bearer of the earth with a twirler of firmaments may have been maximized by the Manichean myth's placement of the wheels of fire, water, and wind close to the Atlas. Quite possibly the concept of the Atlas was approximated by an old local Sogdian divine cosmological wheel-turner; cf. Henning 1937, 59–60 n. 506, who connects **pδfʾrβγyy** with "speeding" and suggests that a local Sogdian god is behind the identification.

Now, Sogd. *(ə)Xšēš-pat* (whose appellation must be independent of that of its MPers. mythic equivalent, the Lord of the Country) names that emanation which Mani, in his original Aramaic, called the "Holder/Possessor of Splendor," which is found in the Syriac tradition (in Ephraem Syrus' *Prose Refutations* and independently in Theodore bar Qōnī), in Greek (Φεγγοκάτοχος), and in Latin (Augustine's *Splenditenens*).[2]

Accordingly, with *-pat* "lord, possessor," **(ə)xšēš* should mean "splendor." From Proto-Iranian **xšaita-* "splendid, bright," attested in Av. *xšaēta-* "*id.*" (e.g. in *huuarəxšaēta-* "the Sun" as bright; Ossetic Digorun *xšēd* "dawn-ruddy"; and Pers. *šēd* "brightness"), we may posit Old Sogdian **xšaiθya-* (with regular **-θya-* from derivational **-t-ya-* still operative after cessation of Sievers' Law); for **-θy-* to Sogd. *-š-*, see Henning 1937, 63 n. 523.[3]

A. D. H. Bivar (1988 *passim;* 1998, 12–30) has built on the Khshathrapati = Mithra theory, taking up again the old Iranizing explanation of the name of the Phoenician god **šdrpʾ**/Σατράπης (dismissed above), and making use of Skjærvø's etymology of *(ə)Xšēš-pat* in putting forth a novel Iranizing explanation of the Hellenistic god Sarapis (Serapis) which has eluded Iranistic criticism and which I must address here.

Bivar moves from the Xanthos *Xšaθrapati-*, allegedly Mithra, to Skjærvø's derivation of *(ə)Xšēš-pat* from **Xšaθrapati-*. However, he ignores Skjærvø's correct equation of *(ə)Xšēš-pat* with *Dahybed* (= the *Splenditenens*). Citing the series of *ratu*-s (chief representations) in the Pahlavi translation of Yasna 19.9, which had been adduced by Sundermann as the source of Mani's rendering of the five emanations of the Living Spirit as the Five Sons of Mithra, "*Mānbed* ('Lord of the House'), *Wisbed* ('Lord of the Clan'), *Zandbed* ('Lord of the Tribe'), and *Zardušt* ('Zarathushtra') is the Fifth," Bivar focuses on the last item. He expects that "Zoroaster" is a Zoroastrian replacement for an original *Šahrbed* < **Xšaθrapati-* "Lord of the Kingdom/Empire" in a series from Median Mithraism in which *Xšaθrapati-*, as designation of an imperial Mithra, was sacrilege for Zarathushtra as well as for Mani, who changed *Šahrbed* to *Pāhr(ag)bed* to name the highest ranking son.[4] The latter son, it must be noted, is the King of Honor, and not the Holder of Splendor. Moreover, it is clear that the Avestan hierarchy is a fourfold canon, *nmāna-* "house," *vīs-* "clan," *zaṇtu-* "tribe," and *daiŋhu-* "land"; the West Iranian imperial use of *xšaθra-* is a later development, and it is absurd to posit a Median ideology which is older than that of the Avesta. More relevantly yet, Bivar invents a word, *šahrbed*, and treats it as a real entity, although it is attested in no form in Middle Persian. It is the fictive *Šahrbed* (< *Xšaθrapati-*), allegedly Mithra as god of the (Median) state, which Bivar then posits as the origin of the Hellenistic god Sarapis, hitherto regarded as Egyptian.

Unfortunately, Bivar's theory was given respectability by N. Sims-Williams (*apud* Boyce 1990, 7), whereby Boyce (op. cit.) was inclined to regard the theory as credible. Sims-Williams bypasses the fictive Sasanian MPers. *šahrbed*, obviously anachronistic in phonology as a source of the early Hellenistic *Sarapis*, and opines instead that *Sarapis* from *Xšaθrapati-* is possible via an early sporadic **-hr-* < **-θr-*, citing forms like Elam. *Irdakšara,* Gr. Ἀρτοξάρης, Babylonian *Ar-taḫ-šá-ri* from *Artaxšáθra-*. Such evidence is inconclusive, since neither the cuneiform languages nor early Greek had a sound *θ* (dental fricative), so that **θ~* could have been approximated as **hr* (Greek Ἀρτοξάρης may have entailed dental dissimilation as well). It is notable that the alleged substandardism does not occur in texts in Aramaic (which could indicate *θ*). And why should a substandard form be used for the god's cultic name abroad?

The fact is that there is no reason whatsoever, ideological or iconographic, to derive Sarapis from Iran, let alone from Mithra. In greater Iran it is only among the Bactrians that the cult of

Sarapis flourished, and here ΣΑΡΑΠΟ (with *s-* and not *š-*) is clearly from the Greek. The magisterial study of Stambaugh 1972 (ignored by Bivar) should leave no doubt of the Egyptian provenience of Sarapis. From linguistic and textual considerations it is clear that this divine name is from Greek (< Late Egyptian compound of "Osiris" + "Apis") ΟΣΕΡΑΠΙΣ (also ΟΣΟΡΑΠΙΣ), metanalysed as Ο *ΣΕΡΑΠΙΣ, Ο *ΣΟΡΑΠΙΣ, further supported by papyrological evidence from the middle of the 4th century B.C.E. (see Stambaugh 1972, 5 and 11) and by iconographic evidence and Classical testimonia (Stambaugh 1972, 6, 44, 52, 61 and passim). It may be added that the oblique form Σαραπιδ-, whose final dental was compared by Bivar with that of his fictive *šahrbed* < **Xšaθrapati-*, is based on Ἀπιδ-, cf. Ἰσιδ-, Ὀσιριδ-, etc.

Thus the entire series of divine names similar to *Xšaθrapati-* —Phoenician **šdrp**ʾ/Σατράπης, Man. Sogd. *(ə)Xšēš-pat*, and Greco-Egyptian Σάραπις— is merely due to coincidence. One may compare (among many such banal random similarities among names of gods as Akkad. *Aššur:* Vedic *Ásura-*); the Phoenician *Melqart*: Corinthian Μελικέρτης; and West Semitic *Dagan*, *Dagon*: Southern Nuristani *Dagon*, *Dagan*.[5]

It has been seen that no Iranian data support the thesis that at Xanthos Mithra lies behind the isolated occurrence of Khshathrapati. Nothing, moreover, accounts for the putative substitution there of the name Khshathrapati for Mithra (a god who, as his hymn [Yt. 10.56] stresses, must be addressed by his proper name).

The new solution for the identification of Khshathrapati on the Xanthos stela will emerge more clearly after a new consideration of the Greek and Aramaic aspects of the inscription. Rather than mention Apollo (and Artemis) explicitly, the Greek text speaks of "Leto and her progeny," which reflects the centrality of Leto, into whose sanctuary Pixodaros, as per the inscription, imported the cult of a god of Kaunos from Caria. Leto was of particular importance at Xanthos as patroness of the Lycian Confederation. Her cult at Lycia was distinguished by her presiding over graves (Burkert 1985, 172). To this chthonic profile of the goddess may be added that the Greek inscription mentions, after Leto and her progeny, the Nymphs, who represented a local volatile spring which (during Alexander's lifetime, according to Plutarch) spontaneously "upheaved from its depths" (and cast forth a tablet inscribed in ancient letters! See citation in Boyce 1990, 9 n. 38). Leto's daughter Artemis (for whom no Iranian equivalence was at hand) was associated with the realm of death as mistress of cruel and bloody sacrifices, and like Apollo (see below) as shooter of arrows (Burkert 1985, 152).

Now to Apollo himself. The Aram. juxtaposition **ʾrtmwš ḥštrpty** provides the names of the sibling pair called in Greek "the progeny of Leto," and we may now see **ḥštrpty** (= Apollo), and not ***ḥštrptyš** = *xšaθrapatiš* (nominative), as reflecting a grammatical linkage in the Old Iranian phrasing which lies behind the Aramaic: *xšaθrapatī*, instrumental case, "(together) with Khshathrapati." Humbach (1981, 33) took **ḥštrpty** as a frozen vocative.

The larger context, in which Khshathrapati is mentioned alongside Artemis in series with the Abyss, Leto, and the Nymphs—all chthonic—would point to a chthonic aspect of Apollo which is reflected in his translation as Khshathrapati. Now, Apollo in western Anatolia had chthonic associations due to his presiding over healing via incubation in artificial grottoes called Charoneia (or Plutoneia). The most famous Charoneion, admiringly described by Strabo three centuries after Pixodaros erected his inscription, was at Characa, in the Carian homeland of Pixodaros.

Apollo became a sun-god only gradually, originally being an underworld god. The foregoing local circumstances would have tended to prolong Apollo's older chthonic nature, his being understood as a sun-god in the Greek world gradually taking place from the 5th century onwards (Burkert 1985, 149).

Apollo's sojourns in the underworld, his close relation to obscurity and death, and his shooting arrows of disease, as well as his healing, are features which make him parallel to the Mesopotamian underworld god Nergal. Furthermore, both Apollo and Nergal are represented by ravens, and are associated with palm trees, snakes, and lions. Both Apollo and Nergal, in aspects of their myths, represent the sun in the netherworld. See Burkert 1985, 149 and 405 n. 22; Kingsley 1999, 82–84, 88–92, 134, 242–43; Bivar 1975, 289.

Now, Nergal's name goes back to a Sumerian phrase "Lord of the Great City" (Wiggermann 2001, 218–19), which refers to a durable Mesopotamian conception of the realm of the dead as a large urban settlement. This points to the con-

ception of Nergal, as lord of such a realm, being calqued in Iranian as *Xšaθrapati-* "Lord of the City" (*xšaθra-* > "city" in West Iranian).

The necessary evidence for an Iranian netherworld god **Xšaθrapati-* comes from Armenian materials conveniently brought together in Russell 1987, 330–32. In a digression to Arm. *šahap* "satrap," Russell mentions the Xanthos Khshathrapati and gives (apparently independently of Bivar, and without equation with Mithra), a series of names which we have seen to be irrelevant: Σατράπης (and by implication **šdrp**ʾ); Man. Sogd. **xšyšpt** (**βγw**); and Σάραπις, adding a suggestion for a Middle Persian etymology of a Coptic "*Sasabed*," the latter based on a misprint in early editions of J. R. Robinson's translation of the Nag Hammadi library; correctly *Sasabek*). What concerns us is Russell's data on *šahapet*, a supernatural being or category of such beings. The citations from the 13th cent. *Oskiberan*, in which various pagan divinities are detailed as *šahapet*-s of trees and vines, attest a connection with vegetation consonant with an ancient chthonic god. The much older citations from the Classical Armenian Agathangelos and Eznik indicate that *šahapet* is associated with tombs and the netherworld, as well as with aquatic and terrestrial reptiles, in particular with serpents, whose forms the *šahapet* can assume, leading men to abandon God for worship of snakes. The latter details, which imply the worship of a *šahapet* intimately connected with snakes, recalls the iconography of Nergal in the Parthian period at Hatra, with snakes all around the god and being part of his accoutrements.[6] We have here evidence of Nergal = *šahapet*, which must derive linguistically from **xšaθrapati-*, like *šahap* < **xšaθrapă–* "satrap," *hazārapet* < **hazārapati-* "chiliarch," etc. This confirms that Khshathrapati "Lord of the (underworld) City/Realm" (a descriptive epithet with the tabuistic advantage of serving to avoid naming the sinister god) was modeled after Nergal.

Such a divinity on ancient West Iranian soil probably lies behind the vague designation of "the god under the earth" to whom Xerxes and Amestris brought human sacrifices, according to Herodotus VII.114. This god, patently non-Zoroastrian, would have been brought to Persia by the Magians as part of their old religion. Thus Khshathrapati would have come to Persia from the Magian homeland, Media, and specifically Media Atropatene. This provenience would suit the northern Mesopotamian history of the Nergal cult, and the origin of the Armenian *Šahapet*.

Linguistically, too, *xšaθrapati-* conforms to Median rather than Old Persian phonology; cf. the Median PN **Xšaθrita-* (Darius, Behistun) vs. OPers. *xšaça-* "empire," and Arm. *šahap* < **xšaθrapă–* "satrap" vs. OPers. *xšaçapă–* "*id.*" Specifically Median phonology in fact characterizes **ʾḥwrʾnyš** = *Axurānīš* "the Nymphs," attested in Old Avestan as *Ahurānīš* (for the reading **ʾḥwrʾnyš**, see Humbach 1981). The non-Persic *xu* < *hu* is shown to be Median by the name rendered as Greek *Κυαξάρης* "Cyaxares" = **Xuwaxštra-* < **Huwaxštra-*.

The presence of the Median god Khshathrapati at Xanthos could be due to the foundation, under Cyrus' dispensation, of the city of Xanthos by Harpagos the Mede and his retinues, including troops and their families, inevitably with a representation of the Median priesthood, i.e. Magi. Later on, the continuation of Magian religious practices would have been tolerated by Darius (as at Persepolis itself), and even under the later Achaemenids, with their syncretistic Zoroastrianism, there is no reason to think that old local traditions on the periphery of the empire would have been opposed, especially in a matter such as an Iranian rendering for a Greek god in the context, moreover, of an intrusive satrapal Carian religiosity.

It is due to these circumstances that there is recoverable at Xanthos a unique trace of the old Median pantheon: Khshathrapati, the Nergal of Western Iran.

Notes

1. Boyce 1990, 8 n. 10, wrongly has "Keeper of Splendour" instead of the Living Spirit.

2. For the Syriac evidence of "Possessor of Splendor" in Ephraem and, later, Theodore, see Jackson 1932, resp. 303 and 296–97 with fnn.; the intervening material in Jackson is informative for my discussion of the five emanations of the Living Spirit.

3. Sogd. *pšʾʾβr*, *pyšʾʾβr* "provision(s)" is better explained from **paθyābara-* "that which one brings on the way"; cf. Henning *apud* Driver 1965, 61.

4. Further material on the Manichean realia may be seen in the well-indexed Sundermann 2001.

5. It is Dagan on a coin of Mazaeus' satrapy. The cereal god holds an ear of grain, and is identified as **bʿl**

dgn "the lord Dagan," not **bʿl trz**. The coin is from Syria, not Tarsus (Lemaire 1991, 45, 47–51). The coin has nothing to do with Mithra or Nergal, *contra* Bivar 1998, 33, and Boyce 1990, 4.

6. For the iconography of Nergal with serpents at Hatra, see Drijvers 1978, 174–75, where remarks relevant to the discussion of Nergal in the present article are also to be found; Drijver's paper also cogently dismisses Bivar's identification of Mithra with Nergal.

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